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A Seasonal Year: Learning to Gather and Celebrate in Business

Join Emma Coxon for the final instalment of her journey on year-long course, A Seasonal Year, as she learns to gather together what she's learnt and celebrate the year that's passed.

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Published Nov 21, 2020

"The edge of the solstice, the barren darkness, the wheel. Nature knows that every cycle must return to stillness and silence. That every inhale has an exhale. That every ending births a beginning. That the light always returns to a future beyond imagination." Victoria Erickson, Author, Edge of Wonder

As the light begins to wane, the temperature drops and the land turns from green to gold, Autumn arrives in all its glory. Hedgerows are bursting with berries, rosehips and nuts, and the harvest is in full swing. It marks the completion of the Celtic Wheel of the Year and the end of the year-long A Seasonal Year course that I embarked on in the Winter of 2019, and what a journey its been! You can read my previous articles on the year so far below:

- Winter - Reflection and Renewal
- Spring - Emerge and Grow
- Summer - Flourish and Nurture

A Seasonal Year is a transformative course designed for small business owners to help re-wild their approach to work, aiming to realign businesses with the ebb and flow of the seasons. Created by Founders of Folk and Field (a community for 'wildhearted wanderers and seekers of slow and those who long for a simpler life inspired by the natural world'), Maddy Lawson and Eleanor Cheetham. Two friends who share a love of nature and a belief in the magic of connection.

"The festival of Lammas at the beginning of August represents the first of three festivals that honour the harvest season. Mabon in mid-September heralds the second such celebration, and throughout the period from now until then - as Autumn creeps in - there's a focus on bringing things to fruition and reaping the rewards of seeds sown back in the Spring." *A Seasonal Year*

As grain is harvested from the fields and fruits and vegetables are picked from allotments and gardens, so too do I turn my attention to harvesting. Gathering together all that I've learnt this year, and picking the fruits of my labour. I prepare to once again slow down, rest and reflect on the year that's passed.

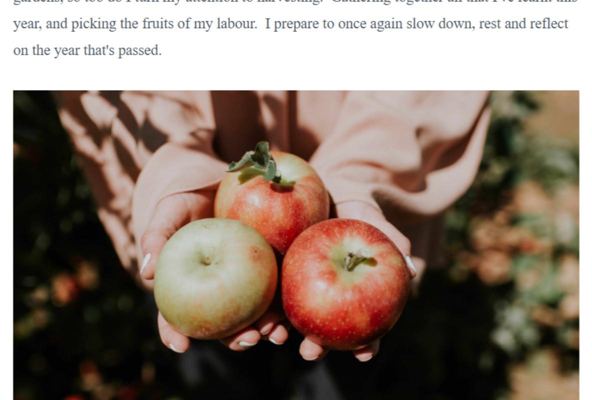

Photo: Natalie Grainger

When I began the course, I was feeling pretty exhausted, with little time to consider where my business was going, or what my successes and lessons had been from the previous year. I gave birth to my beautiful daughter in January 2019 and so my focus shifted from work to motherhood. But, the time had come to stop and reflect, to decide in which direction my business was going and how I wanted the balance of life and work to look going forward.

I had followed Maddy and Eleanor's work for sometime and admired how they ran their businesses with a slow and considered approach, in alignment with nature and the seasons. I wanted to know if I too could find a better balance with life and work by embarking on their course, A Seasonal Year, and I couldn't be more grateful. I've learnt such valuable lessons throughout this course, in particular applying a more gentle approach to how I work, incorporating a fluid structure that takes into account the ebb and flow of energy and light as we move through the seasons. Introducing rituals into my day-to-day routine such as making time each day for walks in nature to get some much needed Vitamin D has been the first step in slowing down.

The time spent at the start of the course, in reflection, last Autumn and Winter allowed me to really tap in to what it is I want from my life and work, and focus on my true purpose. This course and all its lessons has made me realise that I don't want my dream of becoming an artist (a dream I've held since my teenage years) to slip away, and that it was time to place attention on this. By slowing down, looking to nature and being able to 'hear' the wisdom inside myself, assisted by a series of exercises in the course, I've been able to re-connect with my purpose. I want to share a 'little piece of wonder' with the world through art, photography and writing using my Little Piece of Wonder blog as a platform. I want to connect with people worldwide and share all that I've learnt so far in life and what I believe to be true about the magic of the wonders that surround us and how important it is to slow down and appreciate these. These were the seeds, the ideas I had planted after working through the first few modules of the course, and by learning to cultivate the right environment for them to flourish throughout the year, now was the time to harvest these 'fruits.'

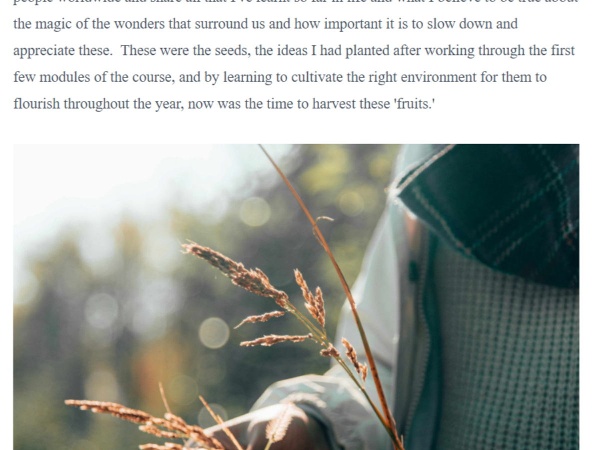

Photo: Joshua Hanson

It's been challenging at times, to change ingrained habits, and stick to my new rituals even though I know how beneficial they are to growth. The global pandemic forced me to take stock, slow down and shift my priorities for a while, as work declined, but discovering the concept of 'tilting' in this course has been a revelation. Tilting, as mentioned in Brooke McAlary's book *Destination Simple; Everyday Rituals for a Slower Life*, is a "revised approach to balance that encourages flexibility and spontaneity when it comes to applying focus...It requires us to stop thriving for perfection and be willing to let go - albeit temporarily - of anything that's not immediately important" (quote taken from A Seasonal Year).

Perfectionism doesn't exist in nature, and neither should it in ourselves or our businesses. Just look outside and you'll see evidence of this all around. The imperfections in nature are in fact full of beauty and are what make it unique and ever changing. By letting go of our perfectionist tendencies and comparison to others, we can cultivate the courage to step forward and into our true purpose with authenticity. One of the quotes shared in the course was from Maya Angelou who once said "courage is the most important of all the virtues because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently." I love Maddy and Eleanor's thoughts on this:

"These words seem especially pertinent to the theme of authenticity and the idea of choosing to craft a life and career around personal values and the rhythms of nature, rather than getting swept along with the dominant cultural narrative of 'traditional' success. It takes courage to follow a different path: without it, it would be all too easy to give up."

It's about going gently, tuning in to the rhythms of the natural world, and having the courage to re-write our own story and let go of what no longer serves us, as we witness with the falling leaves in Autumn.

With the help of A Seasonal Year, I've identified my core values as;

- Authenticity
- Freedom and creativity
- Open-mindedness/adventure
- Love - family and friends
- Health & wellbeing - including time in nature

Yet, to encourage growth in these areas and to live with purpose, the right environment is required to flourish, as it is in nature. This is where another of my most valuable lessons has come from in this course. The idea of a tree to represent our values (the roots), the support we need to grow (the trunk) and each of the key areas of our life that require our attention (the branches). We can outwardly observe this growth throughout the year with buds forming in the coldest months, ready to burst forth when Spring arrives.

The tree analogy can also be adapted with the roots representing our health and wellbeing, that which gives us the grounding and strength to live our best life. The trunk; our business, the plans we have and the day-to-day tasks we do, and the branches, leaves, flowers and fruits; our communities, those who we connect with. Whichever way you look at it, trees can teach us so much about life and work.

With the support and encouragement of the course, I felt able to make the decision to change the way I work. Rather than pushing and striving for more...more clients, more money, more projects, I chose to ground myself, nurture my roots and grow in that direction for a while. Success isn't always about upward growth, an increase in sales, more customers or followers, it can also be about the downward growth we have as we strengthen our roots as we slow down and nurture ourselves. Aoife McElwain describes this beautifully in her book, *Slow at Work*, "for me, slow means calm and considered yet flexible and fluid...it means stepping outside the cult of busyness to gain some perspective on the way we are choosing to spend our work days" (quote from A Seasonal Year). This is how I've come to view my experience of work, and a perspective, thanks to this course, I'm so grateful to have been introduced to. It's given me the confidence to step away from the busyness of life, of the traditional view of success, and forge my own path. Whenever I feel unsure, I just look outside for guidance and remember that nature does not hurry, everything happens in its own good time.

Photo: Annie Spratt

So, here I am once more in Autumn, ready to gather together all that I've learnt, from the seeds of ideas planted at the beginning of my journey, to projects I now want to focus on. To guide us through this process, we are asked to focus on one aspect of our business that we feel is 'ripe' for picking. For me this is Little Piece of Wonder, my blog which will also be the place where I share my art and photography. This is a big step for me, as I have been running my freelance PA business, Assistant Guru, for the past ten years, and more recently writing for Psychologies magazine. I love the work I do with my current clients, and Psychologies, and do not want to let that go, so intend to continue with those. But, by connecting to nature, and feeling confident in the ever evolving cycle, I've gained the courage to recognise that my true purpose is to create; to paint and draw, document the world and its wonders through photography and write about my experiences.

An apple is used as a symbol of the project we want to focus on and five seeds inside represent the elements associated with the natural world (earth, air, fire, water and aether).

"The apple is a symbol of the harvest season, and it is also suggestive of life, renewal and regeneration. For those following the Wheel of the Year, the apple is also said to contain a sacred truth...The circular shape of the apple that surrounds the pentagram represents the ongoing cycle of life and nature, a powerful reminder that we are also cyclical beings, and move through our work and life in a circle, not a straight line." *A Seasonal Year*

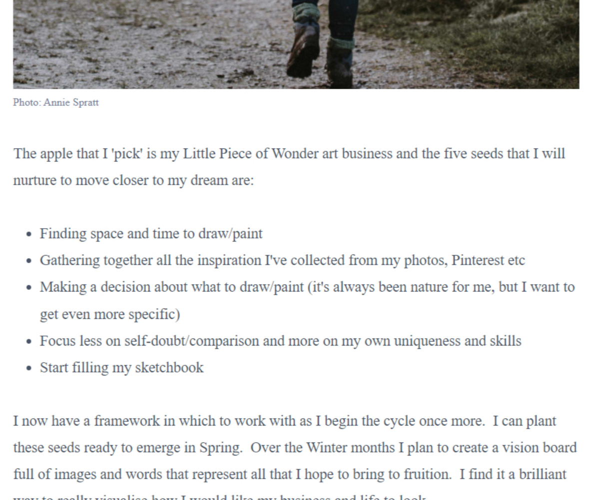

Photo: Annie Spratt

The apple that I 'pick' is my Little Piece of Wonder art business and the five seeds that I will nurture to move closer to my dream are:

- Finding space and time to draw/paint
- Gathering together all the inspiration I've collected from my photos, Pinterest etc
- Making a decision about what to draw/paint (it's always been nature for me, but I want to get even more specific)
- Focus less on self-doubt/comparison and more on my own uniqueness and skills
- Start filling my sketchbook

I now have a framework in which to work with as I begin the cycle once more. I can plant these seeds ready to emerge in Spring. Over the Winter months I plan to create a vision board full of images and words that represent all that I hope to bring to fruition. I find it a brilliant way to really visualise how I would like my business and life to look.

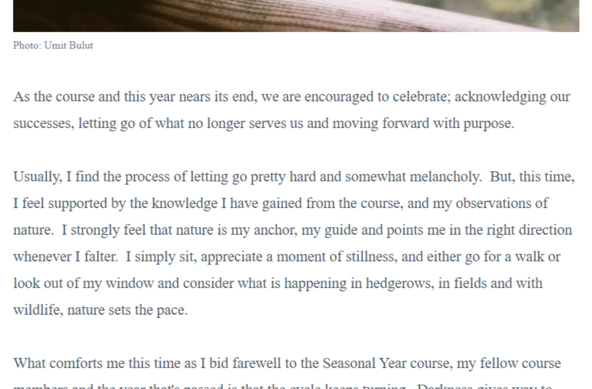

Photo: Umit Bulut

As the course and this year nears its end, we are encouraged to celebrate; acknowledging our successes, letting go of what no longer serves us and moving forward with purpose.

Usually, I find the process of letting go pretty hard and somewhat melancholy. But, this time, I feel supported by the knowledge I have gained from the course, and my observations of nature. I strongly feel that nature is my anchor, my guide and points me in the right direction whenever I falter. I simply sit, appreciate a moment of stillness, and either go for a walk or look out of my window and consider what is happening in hedgerows, in fields and with wildlife, nature sets the pace.

What comforts me this time as I bid farewell to the Seasonal Year course, my fellow course members and the year that's passed is that the cycle keeps turning. Darkness gives way to light, and after Winter always comes Spring.

I'm preparing to let go of Assistant Guru as a brand, and breathe new life into Little Piece of Wonder. It's necessary for me to let go of what no longer makes my heart sing, and focus on that which does. To let go of the habits and stories about myself that no longer serve me. I will take the time to remember all my successes with Assistant Guru, all that this business has given me. I've worked with great clients and have been involved in interesting projects. I've kept my business going for over 10 years, an achievement in itself. But, rather than feel sadness, I can look ahead to exciting new opportunities to come that will bring me in alignment with my true purpose.

It's time to celebrate all that has gone before and all that is to come.

A Seasonal Year was kindly gifted to me and has truly been one of the most inspiring and life affirming experiences I've had. I wholeheartedly believe that nature can teach us so much about how to find balance in our life and work, both intrinsically linked.

If you are interested in finding out more, Maddy and Eleanor from Folk and Field offer two courses to help you work more intuitively and in alignment with the cycles of nature. Discover how the seasons can help your business to flourish with the courses below (enrolment for both begins again next year):

- Re-wild your work course: A self-paced introduction to the foundational concepts of nature-led working.
- A Seasonal Year course: A transformative twelve-month programme for those seeking an extended exploration of nature-led working as part of a small supportive community.

Wishing you a restful and nurturing Winter.

Emma Coxon
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Emma is a freelance writer and Psychologies magazine's Food & Living Editor. She also writes a blog, Little Piece of Wonder focusing on her passion for nature, seasonal and mindful living. She lives in the Wiltshire countryside with her husband and daughter.
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